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Temporary quarters

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Temporary Quarters

by

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PREFACE

For several years, I have been moving from place to place, and at each new address, I have known precisely when I would be leaving. Though I feel that I bonded with the landscape and people of each individual locale, I never could seriously call it home. From Stevens Point, Wisconsin to Americus, Georgia to Ames, Iowa, I have been moving elsewhere at all times. The poetry I have written for *Temporary Quarters* demonstrates my connection with the landscape more directly, while the fiction seems to reflect more upon what I have learned about the people in each region.

Perhaps most influential to my writing was the time I spent in Georgia volunteering with the nonprofit organization, Habitat for Humanity International. While there, I came into contact with countless people, some of whom inspired the work in this collection, who were concerned with or afflicted by problems of housing. These people helped me to realize that when no solid roof stands overhead, the idea of Home is attached to more momentary, yet vitally important, things, such as family, friends, the landscape, and finally the human spirit.

Almost every poem in this collection deals with one of these factors, most often the landscape, from the birds and trees to the land animals or land forms. Several poems cross regional lines to contrast or link them, and none does this more so than the title poem, "Temporary Quarters." Written completely in clauses and spanning the seasons and regions,

it represents the getting-there-ness of my life in recent years, the feeling that I am always on my way somewhere else. Though it ends by tying the clauses with the only full sentence in the poem, it continues to search. Likewise, the staggering of the lines seems to peer into every corner of the page to discover each line's appropriate place.

In similar ways, I played with line spacing and placement throughout the poetry. Much, I have to admit, was instinctive, but more often than not, my instincts held an appropriate level of control over line breaks and line length. There were, naturally, poems that demanded more control and structure, like "Off Campus Heating Instructions." Many of the others though, which may not seem to follow any set form, do follow a sort of pattern. I can best explain my view of the pattern with an analogy to swimming in a large, deep pool. A swimmer can only swim free for so long before he or she must return to the side or do the deadman's float. Since the float is not a good alternative in poetry, I consistently returned to the left margin to touch the side and rest a moment before sending the reader to cast about for another few lines.

In writing the short short fiction, I found myself, most often, looking for the closest representative voice to tell the story. Frequently, this came out in a first person voice like Emmet's in "Major Repairs" and Janie's in "Sidelines." Other times it was necessary to distance the reader from the story to give a more wide-angle perspective on the piece, as in "Out the Back" where it would be nearly impossible to imagine the events from the main character's first person perspective. Finally, I experimented with second person in "After Buffalo," which forces the reader into Anna's and "your" story to experience the convalescent center.

Beyond point of view, one of the most important factors in the effectiveness of the stories was length. All of the stories in this collection are under 5000 words. Any given story has a length in which it can be effectively told, and I have chosen to focus on those stories requiring a small space of concise narration. "Sidelines," the longest story in the collection, needed to be ten pages long to allow for the breadth of important events in young Janie's life, but it needed to remain as short as it was to contain the potential emotion that could have surged from such events as her father's death and the collapse of the boulder. On the opposite end of the scale, a story like "At Breakfast" could be no longer because, in many ways, there is so little to say to a man who suddenly realizes he is getting older. In short, these fictions are told in the requisite space for the most meaningful telling.

Overall, in creating this collection, it was as if not only I were searching for more permanent quarters, but as if each piece was also seeking its own space. As a result, the experiences of constant travel, new landscapes, and finally, freedom constricted by a desire for place helped me to understand that in each setting there is an appropriate feeling of comfort, of belonging, and of Home.

Monica Marie Kamps

Temporary Quarters

halfway to Americus
when I duck under the long low arms
of the broad oak that spans the road
to the Flint which paints itself daily
in brush strokes of mud, red clay,

a half-hour from Stevens Point when blooming bowties
of dogwood burst
from the throats of near-black evergreens
withstanding wind
that plows through fields along Highway 51,

entering Hoyer Coolee, I weave the cliff
fabric's high wall and exit,
finally a few miles from Merrillan where Crystal Hill looms
taller than others of the Ho-Chunk region,

nearing the lone elm that flares up
from the fallow between fields on Highway 10,
then speeding parallel to Soo Line tracks, separated
by a deep ditch
of reeded water and seasonal ducks,

where at the very sight of a spilling combine
I smother
in tornadoes of tassels, corn, and chaff,
still a month from the post-harvest
tweed of Iowa's infinite agriculture,

following manicured campus paths,
where I pass the tall oaks' tender
swollen breasts, their scars healing after limbs
have been severed
and where I watch the willows rise golden
and weep into the dying chests of locusts,

crossing the bog region
of hip-deep drifts of snow
tinged with cranberry tattoo, and of whitetail bucks
standing still, bold against the moonglow
blue of untouched white
in headlights,

always moving, on my way past
a pine plantation, through the ties
of a pecan grove quilt,
shaking the nerves of squirrels, 'possum, flocks of crows,
I seek home
at the end of another long stretch of highway.

FICTION

After Buffalo

Anna cried. Pearlite eyes saw the flowers and did not know who you were. You told her again and again, but she could not believe you came to see her. You looked at her in the bed, a halo of angel-white hair softening the deep, sweeping wrinkles that cut across her face. The face that felt joy and could not smile, but cried, because she could not understand what brought you here, but didn't care, because here you were.

Down further, everything seemed pushed up in her chest. Not breasts, but a mass of bone heaved right up to her neck, tapering down to nothing as if no abdomen existed.

No kneecaps bulged from their sockets beneath the quilt. If she were sitting in a chair, her feet would dangle helplessly, painfully. Your mom told you. She had seen it and told you that the arthritis and the doctors had taken her knees.

You told her, trying to condense the uncondensable, that you were the daughter of the woman who used to visit the woman who used to be her roommate who she remembered, but vaguely. With nothing left to say, you half-handed, half-thrust four carnations in her direction.

She took them and sniffed them slowly. She watched them float away, as she handed them back to you. You explained that they were for her and explained it again because she did not understand.

When she did, she watched them still as she pulled them to her and kissed their petals, soft and softly. You left to find a vase, found one at the desk, and when you returned, she was cradling the carnations close to her body and relishing their nearness. Plastic flowers on the chest of drawers and paper ones on the bulletin board paled in comparison, and you doubted if she would give them up again.

But she did. You slid them into lukewarm water and placed them close where she could see them.

You found out she was from Buffalo and missed it there. When she was young—*your age*—she worked in a chocolate factory and ate *all the chocolate in heaven and earth and never gained a pound*, because she was young and didn't need to worry about that.

Her eyes welled up and her lips trembled like you had read lips trembled when people cried, but you had never really seen lips tremble.

You wanted to cry with her, because she must have been beautiful then, and because her family did not visit her now.

You didn't know what to say. So you took her hand wondering if it was too much. Lilac, velvet hands. Not lilac smell like you may expect an older woman to smell, but the feel and look of lilac. Hands that felt as if they lived beneath your touch, though they lived in disuse.

Squirming under your own skin, you knew, and she knew, that nothing you could say or do could make her feel better. You could not remove her from the bedsore, bedpan, hospital-bed prison.

Anna had her own remedy. She rarely talked of it, but talk she did. You couldn't tell her not to think that way. You did not understand. Still, you couldn't stand the thought, and the reasons to live seemed obvious, but obvious reasons no longer mattered.

Seeing you squirm, she trembled back to the subdued, happy disbelief that you were here. She squeezed your fingers lightly, just to let you know that she was here too.

She dried her tears so you would not leave, but you had to anyway. Leaning across her swollen chest, you kissed her cheek wondering again if maybe it was too much, until you felt her lip touch your cheek in a strained pucker. As if she didn't trust her own eyes and hands, she hung upon her sensitive lips the task of determining if you were real. Perhaps she still was not sure, but the flowers on the table were proof where you were not.

You stood and wished her good-bye, promising that you would come again, while she thanked you and God bless-ed you and thanked you again. Warmed, you squeezed her hand, gently so you wouldn't crush it, like bread crumbs under your fingers. Finally, you mumbled another good-bye and walked out.

You shook down the hall, as positive that day that she thought you were an angel as you were that one had sent you.

* * * * *

For the next week, you thought of your promise to return, knowing you would return and trying to justify backing out. You knew what to expect this time.

Somehow, you convinced yourself that you could help, free her from her mattress prison, if only for a short time. With the birth of purpose, your insecurities diminished, and you bolstered your spirits for another visit.

A magazine, specially chosen for its bits of inspiration, secure in your backpack, you rode up the hill and walked though three sterile doorways to her room. "Hello, Anna." Her face brightened and clouded as she simultaneously realized that she had a visitor and that she did not remember who you were.

You reminded her, pointing to the flowers that still bloomed, and were amazed yourself at their longevity. Her eyes rested on the flowers like you had brought them fresh.

You told her you had a surprise and she was wary. You thought she would like a story about a hill. Someplace quiet and beautiful where wildflowers bloomed naturally around her and she sat, free of nurses and nighttime pharmaceuticals and numbness. But you worried that it was too much as you began to read. She stopped you, only half a paragraph up the hill.

I know where I want to be. She ended the story.

Anna spoke again of the chocolate factory and of Buffalo and of her family. She did not like the male nurses washing her. They were rough.

And you had to leave. You wished her good-bye again amidst the same thank yous and God bless yous as last time and shivered and wondered how often you would return to this room.

* * * * *

Time passed and you continued to visit. Sometimes, you brought more flowers; sometimes just yourself. Some days she remembered you, and others, she didn't.

* * * * *

One day, when you entered, without looking up, she said she was done. You could take the bedpan. You brought a nurse and waited in the hall wondering if you should stay at all.

But the nurse finished before you could decide to leave, and you went in. Her embarrassment was there on her face but covered up so you could barely see it. You hoped your own was covered up as well.

As usual, you held her velvety hand while she talked. She told you to stay in school and get educated, and that she had worked in a publishing house for a time. You wanted to know more and more, but she couldn't remember much.

That day, when you rose to leave, she stopped you. Something was poking her foot, and *would you reach under the covers and get it* for her? You cringed, ashamed of your cringing, and lifted the tightly tucked sheets.

Sliding a hand between the sheets, you found her foot. The phantom pain was poking her between the toes of her left foot, and as you brushed nimbly around and between those toes, rotting flesh stuck to your fingers, and still you could not find the offending poker.

Finally, trying the other foot, you realized that what she thought and you thought was her left foot was her right. When you could alleviate some of her pain, but not all of it, she said it was okay, and freed you.

You pulled your hand from between the sheets and felt the strange, smooth consistency of flesh that you never realized could rot on a living person. You stood awkward, selfish, at the foot of her bed not knowing what to say or do until she told you *it's all right, you can wash your hands*. You scrubbed as if to take off your own skin.

As usual, you promised to come back and kissed her good-bye, loving her yet more concerned about the flesh on your hand and under your fingernails. As you shook down the hall this time, you were sure of just one thing: both you and she wished you were a stronger person.

When you got home that day, you scrubbed and scrubbed, cleaned out your fingernails and washed some more. Still, after all of it, you could not bear to touch anything to eat. You must have scrubbed her off pretty well though, because as much as you meant to, you never went back to visit. The day the obituary appeared in the paper, you sat in your rocker and felt your own papery skin against itself.

At Breakfast

The bag opened with great difficulty. When it did, cereal sprayed everywhere.

Father, watching me, nodded sadly. "What will I do when I am old?"

Out the Back

Emil felt sorry for the old man in the other car. He must already have used up his first life or worse yet, he'd only gotten one. Only one! Good for Emil that he had an extra. Too bad for Emil he didn't find out about it until he was flying through the air, over the heads of two small children who, at that moment, had rounded the corner on their bikes.

Emil had been launched from the window of the car, shattering it and his own skull. Lying in the ditch across the intersection, he examined the veins in the blades of grass that leaned beneath his weight, and traced them carefully down to his own blue veins. In his green eyes, they pulsed visibly from the hem of his torn sleeve.

The two kids turned their bikes around and rode screaming from the corner to the chipped-paint box house up the road. Emil followed them with his eyes. Then with his head. His neck. His shoulders. Within minutes his whole body was loose and limber as he had never been before. It occurred to him that his bones felt almost pliable and he rose to his feet, breaking the connection with all those green veins.

The ditch had been damp and the matted patch from which he rose was tinged with dark red, which gave everything a grayish cast. As he climbed from the ditch and over the shoulder, his legs were crazy, knocking in and out at will. He reminded himself of a crane.

Crossing the road, he noticed people were beginning to stop. A tractor, home early from the field rumbled close and halted a few yards from the wreck, careful not to block the way for other drivers. The farmer scrambled down with the shit cracking off his boot heels.

A station wagon carrying a mother and two children, their faces peering from the way back, tooled slowly by, undecided whether to stop or not. The ice cream might melt. Or did the mother have only one life left too?

When he was as young as the faces in the window, his mother had told him, hovering in the waves of heat from the oven, "Someday, you'll know." He didn't know what, but he knew better than to ask then. Ever since, any time he knew something, he wondered if now he knew.

Emil, becoming more and more comfortable in the looseness of his flesh, ambled to the passenger window of the old man's Olds Classic. He supposed that today was someday and now he knew. The old man, slumped in tan tweed against his own wrists, was dead. Same way Emil knew he was alive for the last time. No more. Two's the magic number. One piece shy of the whole pie.

The farmer was next to the old man now, pulling the sleeve of the limp arm, and hollering into the open window, as if the man might hear him, "Are you okay?" then enunciating deeply and excitedly, "Are-you-o-kay?"

Likewise, the mother had made up her mind to stop, setting the brakes squealing and easing onto the shoulder. The children's eyes flared wider and the mother made a note to herself to get those brakes checked the next day, even as she ordered her children to stay put.

She pointed as if they were dogs and the stern twist of her index finger would freeze them in place.

Moments later, she was at Emil's side forcing him to lie flat on the bed of gravel and daubing his head with the hem of her gypsy skirt. Like an echo getting softer against a canyon wall, she breathed excitedly close to his ear, "Are you okay?"

Seeing the old man was not responding, the farmer began pulling him, prying his fingers from the curve of the steering wheel, from the car. The farmer moaned quietly at the warm slick of the old man's tired blood.

It was the blood of a one-lifer, Emil thought. He could feel the bits of gravel stab through his shorts and stick in the backs of his legs. Mixed with the stones were tiny fragments of broken bottles left behind by teenagers forced to drink cheap beer late on weekend nights. The brown shards with their sharp edges and pricking points bit into him and made him bleed.

Another woman, wearing a bandanna across her forehead against the heat, and denim cutoffs that floated somewhere beneath her knees, ran up the road. The two children on bicycles plowed ahead of her, and a tall lanky youth bumbled up behind. Emil knew the boy must have been brought along for something dramatic, to lift cars off victim's crushed legs or to give sweaty, breathy mouth-to-mouth where necessary.

The second woman, in a panic, announced to them all, whirling her speech around Emil's head, that the ambulance was on the way and blathered about the damn corner and how no one ever stopped at that stop sign and how the county should do something and—

"Shut up Angela!" The mother attending the wounds on Emil's head eyed Angela carefully and froze her with the look. Emil could tell Angela still had both lives left. She was

careless and did not know that the first time is quick, almost imperceptible, and she could lose it just as easily as pricking her finger on a knife tip while cutting open a piece of fruit or standing too long in a lightning storm or getting sideswiped on a country road by an old man who will minutes later be lying dead on that road himself. It could happen like that.

Emil snapped his fingers high up in the air and the mother pulled his arm to his side. Her face wavered in his sight, and for a moment, he was her child.

The lanky boy stood gawking since there were no cars to lift off of any people and scratched his rough knee through his jeans. Angela stood by looking down at all of them, biting her thumbnail as beads of sweat congregated in her cleavage. Each time a breeze crossed her cheek, she sucked in her breath to say something else in a heat, but remembering the mother, only chewed her nail shorter.

Emil could feel the glass still sticking into him. Each puncture let out his second life from the back where the mother could not see. That was how it happened the second time—slowly, painfully. Out the back.

Lying on the shoulder, his head cushioned by the grass of the ditch and lolling off to the side, he could see under the cars that clung to each other and still creaked like lovers settling into a deep sleep. To his left, the farmer crouched alone next to the old man. He cradled the already small and withering head in one great callused paw and listened intently at intervals to the sinking chest. Emil could see clearly two tears flash into the neck flaps that lay flat and parallel to the earth.

"Dad," the farmer moaned.

Beyond the crumpled sedan, the two children had released themselves from the hatch of the way back and were running on spindle legs. They leapt over the ditch and back and

across again into the field. These children's legs attracted those of the other two who left their bikes leaning together against a tree to dive arms-first into the field after them.

Emil traced the veins in the grass blades through the spokes of the bicycles. He pointed to the children rustling the corn in the field. Rolling first his eyes and finally the rest of his head back to the mother, he whispered, "They have two. I know now."

The mother nodded.

Auto Revision

When I arrived, brought my too-old car to the dealership for an estimate, just an estimate, I sat in a stiff wooden chair with rough, dingy upholstery and tried to hold my stomach against the sweet-greasy odor of the place. I waited while an I-don't-know-what banged in another room and the soap opera on TV sent up waves of conflict which were soaked up by the only man in the room.

I read my book of course, not to be bested by the lure of "Days." After the man had gone to retrieve his repaired vehicle though and I had tapped the button on the television to shut it off, I thought there was, perhaps, a story in the people on the other side of the halfwall I could not see over.

They spoke—an elderly woman quizzing a girl on her college life, her car, her major, her car, her family, her money, her car—until the girl's car was fixed and she left. With half my story gone, I continued reading, but thought of how there was still half a story on the other side of the halfwall. But I was reading about writing and couldn't stop to write.

When the service man came to tell the elderly woman about the repairs she needed ($700 worth on a $500 car), they talked at length while I listened between paragraphs, to her limited options. In between listening between paragraphs, I thought there was a story in this

woman at the dealership. A story in this woman who, I found out later, wore her red beret and red scarf askew and her windpants under a woolen skirt.

At long last the service man left her and she mumbled over her predicament on the other side of the halfwall.

"There're a lot of decisions to make, aren't there?" I called over. My great attempt at getting the story.

She gave me the moral. She told me, "Don't let your car get too old."

She was gone to retrieve her unrepaired vehicle, and I went back to reading. No story there. Wanting a table for my reading, a table I knew stood behind the halfwall, I rounded it and again could not see over it to the side I'd left. An elderly man came in. A kindly old gentleman at the dealership. A kindly old gentleman he turned out to be, coming to my side of the halfwall for a cup of complementary coffee and hello-ed me with surprise. But he went back to the opposite side of the wall where he sat in a stiff wooden chair with dingy upholstery to rattle and wrinkle and read a newspaper.

Could be a story, I thought at the table I had to myself, but returned to my book about writing and reading.

I heard, half-listening, a girl come in and exchange greetings with the elderly man, and I wondered if it was the same old story as before but with new characters, with the twist that an elderly man might give the plot. From my side of the halfwall, I couldn't get a feel for it, the story, and went on reading and thinking and listening, and reading about writing and reading and pleasure, and reading with pleasure, until the kindly old gentleman stopped rattling and wrinkling his newspaper to go see about his car.

Moments later, winding around walls and halfwalls to my table, my service man came in with my estimate, just my estimate.

"You'll have to replace these," he told me and pointed to his labeled diagram. He explained to me all about parts and problems and repairs in service-man-language. But it lost something in the translation.

I thought, The estimate. Just the estimate. I thought, There's a story here.

"So you're telling me," I asked the service man, " that my car is like my story here. If this one piece falls apart, I'm stuck on the interstate nowhere near my destination?"

He nodded. "Sure," he said. I nodded too, thinking, this story's not there yet. I told the service man, "Fix it."

Major Repairs

I fix things. Always been able to. Been fixing cars and toasters and heaters and all that since I was little and Mama couldn't work out the problem with my sister's bike. Been a long time since then though. Long time. One day, Daddy had a bag packed for me and said, "Boy, you're almost a man, but you're not there yet and you won't learn it here. So get going." I've been going, like he said, ever since. Seems to me, as I went, my gift for fixing things may have left me some. I sure can't fix what I'm in now.

Found a job at a garage pretty soon after I left Daddy's, sweeping up and all, and the owner gave me a beat-up trailer to stay in out back. It was drafty back there, but it was a roof and Daddy'd always told me it was the roof that was important. Stayed there a couple years I think, but it didn't take long for the owner to see I had good hands. Good, strong hands. Put me up as his apprentice. That old man wouldn't let me wear gloves when I worked under the hood, so my hands burned every time on the hot engine blocks. I learned fast and didn't make a sound when my skin singed. By the time I was a full mechanic, my hands were so callused I could hardly feel anything but the hex angles of a nut.

It makes Angel House hard for me. Being around all these sick folks without any symptoms myself. Still, I'm on restricted leave. Can't go anywhere without special

permission from Mrs. Cressler. She controls my money and how I spend my time too, usually doing nothing. She likes it that way though. Probably sounds bad, a forty-year-old man held up that way, but I chose it. Angel House or jail, they told me, and I chose the house.

It's not so bad here. Feed us alright, and the others don't have much appetite and give me their meals too, so they won't get in trouble with Mrs. Cressler for not eating. Roommate sleeps all the time. He's in the later stages, so I try not to be in there too much. He says watching my hands makes him sick to his stomach anyway, says he gets motion sick now. Best if I stay away from him. So it's like today, I went outside under the carport with some of the others. Chain-smoked and played cards most of the afternoon. Four of us sat under there and watched Rodney, one of the gay boys, plant some ratty-looking roses in a square of ground he dug up.

"What's he doin' out there, Emmet?" Rodg asked me.

"Don't know why you think I should know?"

"You go to meetings," Mick said and picked up the card that filled out his Rummy hand.

Watched him working in that garden while I shuffled the deck for the next hand. My hands are soft now, the calluses worn down. "You want to know what Rodney's doin', you go to tonight's meeting," I told them.

That was all, and we went back to playing cards, but it got me thinking. I think a whole lot with nothing else to do. Thought about how the foundation got those roses for Rodney. Used to be a gardener up north or something, like I used to be a mechanic. Only, the foundation never got me anything. Hasn't even got me my cocktails.

That's why I asked Mrs. Cressler for permission to go to Medicaid to see about my card again. *Gotta go*, I told her. *Gotta get those cocktails. Makes a man nervous to go without them even when he's feeling fine*. Didn't tell her I just needed out of the cage for a couple hours.

Seemed strange though that when I talked to her, she just watched. Didn't object. Didn't say anything. Looked a little smug, maybe, but nothing else. Couldn't figure why, until I saw her eyes flick all over, following my hands.

We both knew. I could say I don't know why my hands twist around, but I know it's the liquor. It's out of my system, I'd swear it, but it's all still there, the effects. So she watched them, my hands. Knew it was the liquor and hit me with that smug look. Never liked me. That's why she let me leave. Wanted me to get into trouble, so she told me right off, "Yes, you may go. Straight to the Medicaid office, and straight back. You've got three hours." That's how I knew she wanted me to get into trouble. It'd only take me an hour to get there and back by bus. Even gave me too much money for the ride.

I was mad as hell. Still am. Went to the Medicaid office. Wanted to get started on those cocktails. Hoping to get 3TC and Norvir since AZT made me sick last time and the virus's built up some immunity to so many others. Happens every time I get out of jail. Get on something, get out and have to wait at least a month until I get back on Medicaid. Have to start some new cocktail. Been in and out three times, and've lost as many choices for combinations to take. Four months since I've been to see a doctor too.

Got down to the Medicaid office and sure, they didn't have me processed yet. "I haven't seen a doctor in five months," I beefed up the number a little for the lady behind the desk.

"I'm sorry," she whined. "I can't do anything until we have your information processed."

Shouldn't worry. T-cells were up around 950 when I saw the doctor last, but I'd just feel better talking to someone. Anyhow, only took me twenty minutes to find out the receptionist didn't know anything. Still had two and a half hours and didn't want to waste them going back to the house. Should have. Can't change that now.

I just got out on that street and even the sidewalk felt different. Can't explain it but it was like being free even though I knew I was going back. And then I wasn't going back. Hopped the bus to my friend, Zeke's house. When I knocked at his door, he was tipping a forty of malt, and he passed me the bottle through a tear in the screen.

"How'd you get out?" he asked.

"Got permission." Looked at the bottle a minute and tried to give it back, at least thought about giving it back. Can't claim I moved to do it. That malt looked so good and I could smell it. Could almost smell the garage, and it hadn't changed. Bottle was cold in my hand, and the dew beaded up on it and I couldn't help it. Took it down. Drank deep and slow and let the gas rise in my nose. Belched. "That's good malt."

"Picked it up today. Only a buck nineteen. Been saving up the old lady's change for a good drunk. C'mon in." Pushed open the screen door for me and I walked in. Smelled like he was brewing it himself in there. An empty on the floor next to his sunken chair. Probably more in the kitchen. I sat down while he cracked another forty from the reefer. Sweet sound, hissing out under the cap. Sweet and cool.

"Can't stay long," I told him and took another swig.

"Stay as long as you like. Mona's not coming back the rest of the afternoon."

I did. Can't say how long, but it felt like hours before Zeke asked me when I had to be back at Angel House.

"Supposed to be back already," I told him. I knew I couldn't go like that. Had to sober up first. Swallowed the bottom of the bottle and went for another. Had to drink more before I sobered up.

Waiting for day five

I heard her at 3:23, pacing again. Or should I say still. Mama hasn't stopped pacing in four days, or any time it has rained in the last year for that matter. She can't even say the words rain or flood, but they are what keep her awake these mornings, moving back and forth across the bedroom floor.

For me, I can always sleep through the hollow slap of the rain on the roof, but Mama's footsteps are terrifying, like giants stomping through the hollow trailer. Wide awake, I crawl into the hallway. Sometimes, I pray. Tonite, I just watch.

From the night table, she shuffles past the dresser, past the plant stand, past the window (careful not to look out), past the painting at her right shoulder, touches the far wall, and turns. She retraces her steps, past the painting now at her left shoulder, past the window (looking right, into the shadows of the room), past the potted fern, past the dresser, touches the night table in the darkness with her knee, and turns.

I was eleven last year when, on day six, the water had seeped in slowly at first, our only warning that the river was climbing our front stoop. She had stepped in the puddle that formed by the door to our trailer, felt the carpet's saturation through her slipper.

It doesn't matter that we've moved to another park now, that we live on higher ground. We can both hear the way the raindrops sound like stones against the tin roofing. She still walks past the man in the painting, past the window (concentrating on her next step), past the fern on the stand, past the dresser where she picks up her St. Christopher medal and slips it into the pocket of her robe. She looks into the round vanity mirror over the dresser. Her eyes are sunken. No sleep in the day either; the patter seems still louder when you can see it too, collecting in ominous puddles that run over the edges and into the gutters.

She walks past the window (looking at the inner wall), past the painting, touches the far wall and turns.

"Thank God Evie sleeps through . . . Thank God Evie sleeps through . . ." she chants. I fill in the word "the rain" for her as she continues to pray for me. It is eerily like she looks at me through the wall that divides our bedrooms, checking in her heart to make sure I am okay. Another way that I know she doesn't really notice anything—I am not okay.

I don't sleep much during spells of rain. It's always muggy and I want to be awake with her. She doesn't know though. If she did, she might try to stop, and I worry she'd go crazy then.

She collapses to the floor beneath the window (careful to avoid looking up and out). With her hands, like a blind woman who has to feel her way, she checks the carpet against the wall. "Dry, dry, dry, dry . . . a little cool," I hear her whisper. She will check again later, I know.

After stepping in the puddled carpet last year, she had not looked outside before swinging the outer door wide. Choked and stunned, we were swept back against the living

room couch. I was crying when she grabbed my arm, snatched the key from the high hook, and dragged me into the swirling water.

Thunder rumbles after a flash of lightning, and the rain falls harder for the moment. Rising, she turns her back to the window. She shuffles to the night table, touches it with her knee and turns. There, she cocks her head at the painting and speeds toward it, past the dresser, past the fern.

The man in the painting leans forward, holding his hat against a heavy wind. She tilts the frame until he stands upright and seems only to tip his hat to her. Mama jumps when the myrtle branches smack the trailer's tin siding. Their blossoms disappeared days ago.

Like the past three nights, pulling the pockets of her robe, she turns to the wall and to the left again where, in the open closet, her boots stand at attention. She picks them up and walks past the painting, past the window (looking at the bed where she will put on her boots).

I used to worry that she would see me peering in from the hallway. After a year of these nights though, I know she doesn't really notice anything but the pounding on the windowsill she refuses to look at.

I swing myself around and lean against the doorjamb of my bedroom, a cushion of long hair behind my back. To avoid watching for awhile, I stare instead at the shadow angles my knobby legs make in the lightning flashes. But I know as she pulls the boots tight, her whole body's muscles tighten, as if the laces were puppet strings. Someone else is in control of her body. She begins to chant in a raspy voice that frightens me at night. "I am ready. I am ready."

There is a bag packed for me under her bed. I found it three days ago, stuffed with my favorite sweaters, a pair of jeans, five pairs of underwear, and an old teddy bear from when I was little. That was day one, when the rain was predicted to last only two or three days.

Boots on. It's 4:13. She walks past the dresser, past the fern . . . touches the wall, turns.

Her footsteps come toward the hallway. She does not see me crouched in the doorway on her way to the bathroom where she fills a glass. She carries it past me, past the painting, past the window. Prying back the plant's yellowing fronds, she pours the water, which floods and gradually soaks in. Tired leaves sprinkle down like raindrops in another lightning flash.

She places the glass on the dresser and continues pacing past the window (looking at the plant leavings on the carpet), past the picture.

A flash crosses the ripple of the glass. Nights like this the smell of sewer backup still burns in my nose like it did for months after the flood, and I can hear Mrs. Fitchens, our neighbor, screaming for her babies from the roof of her trailer, and the rush of water when it tipped over and she washed away. The worst for Mama back then was the household bits and pieces, end tables and wood siding, that battered us and threatened to break the lockhold she had on my arm.

5:21 now. Having touched the night table with her knee, she turns and steps past the dresser, past the plant.

She is high-stepping; her boot tips brush the fringe of her robe. In front of the window, in front of the pounding rain, she drops to the floor (does *not* look out) and again,

searches the carpet for signs. "Dry, dry, dry, dry, ..." A damp spot. She feels all around as my throat clenches uncontrollably. I think I might throw up.

The fern must have overflowed when she watered it, because she crawls past the window (head down, gagging on heavy sobs), past the painting over her head, and touches the wall. Curling into the corner of the room, she sits. There, she waits for the water to rise around her.

Sidelines

It was just a boulder you know? Two years later, I still think of it as this giant dumb boulder that sat in the middle, no not the middle, maybe to the left of center depending on the angle, but anyway, right in the soccer field. And soccer was big in my hometown too. Big! Maybe it was the kids who liked it, but I think it was the parents who forced the kids, maybe the parents who wanted to be young like us again.

Like my parents, my mom really. She always talked about how she wanted to play soccer on that field when she was ten like me. She'd tell me, "I remember when that boulder was taller than me too just like it's taller than you now, Janie" even though the closest she could get to the boulder back then was when she got to go out and congratulate my dad after a game. Then she'd say, "And now, here's this nice opportunity for you"—her face always wrinkled like she was in pain when she said it—for me to play a nice coed sport. So there I was on the soccer field after school every day.

The field was far enough away that some of the van moms had to carpool us to practice, but they didn't mind. I think my mom, who drove a Beetle, was jealous and sometimes offered anyway, insisting that we weren't that big and couldn't one or two fit in the back seat? She just wasn't a van mom though and I always rode with Mrs. Caskey who drove fast and hit the one steep hill a little on the fly so I could feel it in my stomach. There

was even this one time when we came up over the hill, and this big Mack truck came up over it from the other side and we had to swerve to miss it, and the truck's horn was honking so it was all I could hear. Mrs. Caskey was yelling "Holy Jesus!" and I wondered if it was like that for my dad when he got hit.

It was how I always pictured it since the day Mom explained to me what happened. She used the same voice she used when she told me that my Girl Scout troop was "disbanding due to lack of leadership," using big words so I wasn't sure I understood. Well it was like that when she told me about Dad. "Head-on impact" and too many "lacerations." I sat in the same spot on the couch both times too. I don't sit there now. I wanted to ask Mrs. Caskey to slow down on that hill when the dreams started, but I never did.

But back to the boulder. You'd think with all these parents someone would know someone who could convince the city to bulldoze it the twenty feet off the field. But the town council wouldn't hear of it. Rumors went around that the mayor or someone had kissed his wife for the first time there and she didn't want to see it go. Anyway, the council suggested moving the field, just playing somewhere else. Not a bad idea, I thought, since they were talking about a piece of land only a block from school. Then we could walk to practice. One of the businesses in town had been eying up that lot for a parking lot though and before we knew it our one best chance was blacktopped.

Besides, the parents were beginning to complain by then. They had roots in the field, they said. Lots of them met their spouses and high school sweethearts in that field, they said. No one knew why it was even built there all those years before, but it was, boulder and all, and after months of going back and forth with the city about where to move the field, they

just said they wouldn't give it up. Mom called it "a stalemate" when the city finally refused any offers of help.

Think the van moms just wanted to have a reason to keep taking us out there, and no one seemed to question it. I think the only time anyone tried to stand up to one of the van moms was this one time, Marty Van Speek forgot his cleats and ran home to get them, so he was a couple minutes late for van pick-up. Well, Mrs. Andrews, who always drove her two kids and Marty and the Redmond triplets, was standing outside the van waiting for him and, well, I only heard about it later, but he said he told her he needed his cleats and she said he should have told her before he went home. He said he only lived a block away and she could fuck off and she just glared at him and got in the van and left him there.

So anyhow this boulder—it was so huge that sometimes when we took breaks during practice, me and my best friends, Marie, Sharon, and Shelley would climb up the side and sit there looking down at the smaller kids on the team, hoping none of the bigger ones would come and kick us off. Other than that, we ignored it. It got so we hardly even knew what it looked like. All I remember now is that it was all blotched up with spray paint on the sides so you could hardly see the gray stone of it underneath.

Ever since most of our dads could remember, kids just played games around it. Might sound strange at first but that's what we always did. It was kind of a mascot. Coach said it made us stronger. It forced us to anticipate because we didn't know who was coming around it. That was good too because if Mickey Sanders was coming around it, you didn't want to know. If you did, you would just turn around and give up the ball to him. He'd take it anyway. He was that good and he used the boulder to sneak up on you too. When he stole from me, sometimes he pushed me down. Mom said it was because he liked me. Then, she

talked all about how she met Dad at the soccer field when they were kids, and I'd ask, "Did he knock you down?" She told me no and then told me, again, about how Dad used to smile at her just before he scored a goal, which I know wasn't true because to score you have to look right into the net. "Right into the lion's mouth," Coach used to say.

The other thing Coach told us all the time was that "you gotta do what needs to be done," and I wasn't always sure what he meant by that. I used to think he was talking about scoring goals, but now I think he meant what the parents did about the boulder. When I first heard they were going to use my dad's idea to light the week-long bonfire around it, I thought it was weird. They hadn't listened to him when he was alive even though he was an engineer.

I couldn't figure out why they were going to do it until I heard Mindy McCall telling some of the kids at school it was her dad's idea. I told her it was my dad's idea, but I wouldn't fight her, even though she was always asking me, "Do you wanna fight about it? Are you calling me a liar?" I said no 'cause she was big and also I knew it was my dad who told her dad and because it made me kinda sad to fight about my dad. Besides, all the parents loved the idea and dragged us kids to the bonfire and all that. I felt like it was all kind of a shrine to Dad—especially with the dreams of him being there and all—and I sometimes talked to him a little while I stoked it up or put a log on it. I had to explain to him that I knew the idea was his because I knew he hated this boulder and always wanted it gone so I could play soccer on a real field, and I had to tell him why I wouldn't fight Mindy for it. He understood.

I have to admit, I thought the fire was pretty cool. It was big because Mindy McCall's dad worked for a lumber mill and got the head sawyer to donate all the scrap that usually got chipped for playgrounds and stuff to the soccer team. Maybe that's why Mindy thought it

was her dad's idea. But anyway the fire was big and we all had to take turns stoking it. What I mean by "we all" is us kids 'cause the moms and dads, except the van moms, sat around the bonfire roasting marshmallows and drinking beer and telling us to "throw on another log over there sweetie," and "honey, what's your name? Could you poke up the fire a little on this side?"

The van moms sat in their own little group and talked about their vans and how appalling it was that the other parents were drinking in front of the "little ones" and weren't they glad that none of those parents had vans because they "wouldn't want their kids driving around with—" They'd look at me and then my mom who was drinking with the other parents, and I'd hear "such a pity" and I'd go back to poking my stick into the fire. They would crowd into a tight little circle and all I could hear after that was "Burt," my dad's name, every now and then until one turned back to tell us "it's getting a little low over there."

I got kissed at the bonfire. It was on the third day when it was getting dark and me and Marty Van Speek were sitting on the bleachers at the far end of the field and I was telling him how cool it was that he told Mrs. Andrews to fuck off. He just shrugged so I switched and told him how cool I thought the light from the bonfire was and then he kissed me. My face got hot, but we were too far from the fire for that to be why and he kissed me again, hard, on the lips. I'd say it was wonderful and maybe even romantic, but he had bad breath and chapped lips and I just looked at him until I got tagged from under the bleachers and my best best friend, Marie, was yelling that I was it. I touched Marty, told him he was it, and tore down the bleachers before he knew what to do.

The fire burned high for about four days. Every night, when we went home for a few hours to sleep and eat and change, my mom made me shower before I went to bed. I was always tired and set the shower to the hottest water I could stand 'cause I felt cold away from the fire. The water always swirled this dingy gray color into the tub. "Soot," Mom said and drank a whole glass of water to wash down some aspirin.

When I woke up the next day, she was singing in her happy morning voice. Then, she was scrunching her face and yelling, "Let's get going Janie! Let's go!" when I was still shaking off another one of these weird dreams I've had ever since. In the dream, I was walking toward the bonfire and when I got close enough to see the way the boulder had gone sooty on the underside, covering the spray paint, and how the black on the bottom made the upper half glow a kind of gray-silver from the moon, there was my dad. He looked like he always did in blue jeans and a plaid shirt and he smiled at me. And just when I was running toward him, the fire puttered out. It looked like the night fell down on it and it was just gone. No smoke. No coals. And I looked around and there was no Dad. He was gone and I woke up like that and Mom was calling again to "get up" and "get dressed" and "we're going to be late for our shift at the bonfire." In five minutes I was dressed and waiting by the car for Mom to find her purse so we could pick up a case of beer and a couple bags of chips and jelly doughnuts for the other parents.

When we got there, three dads were slumped in webbed chairs asleep with their feet roasting by the fire, and another one, Mr. Berend, Alec's dad who was divorced, was hugging a beer and crouching near the fire. We were the first there for the day shift. His eyes lit up

when he saw us coming, but he looked like he didn't know quite what to say to us. "So Janie, what do you think of this fire?"

"Where's Alec?" I asked, not really trusting his bloodshot eyes.

"He's sleeping over with the Van Speek boy. So can you believe it will only take a little hose to blow this rock apart in a few days?"

I looked at my mom. She just smiled hard at me like she could will me to be nice. "Before my dad died, he told me that we'd need a lot more than just a garden hose to cool it fast enough."

Mr. Berend's cheeks flushed and he took a couple steps away from the fire. "Well, that's a pretty complex concept for someone so young to understand. Oh look, there's some of the others for the day shift."

Before long, me and some of my friends were kicking the ball around and playing in the World Cup and crowds were cheering. The day shift parents were talking and laughing loud. Mr. Berend was leaning close to Mom and at one point, tipped so far toward her ear that I could see his chair bending over in her direction too. Then I checked and Alec was playing and must have shown up some time earlier in the morning. I looked again at my mom and Mr. Berend, and then Mindy McCall kicked the ball hard at me so it hit me in the head, and she called, "You're in," and I went back to playing.

When I talked to Mom later that day, Mr. Berend stood around near us, and I thought I could almost smell his beer breath but it could have been the cans burning in the bonfire. Mom cupped my head like she was smelling a flower and whispered that we'd go soon and I should be patient. Couldn't I just be patient with her?

That went on for days, you know? Each morning, play started and each afternoon the older, bigger, faster kids won the Cup, ('cause they cheated and body-checked us smaller kids when the parents couldn't see us around the boulder) and all day we took turns watching the fire. By the end of the day, we were always bored and the parents kept telling us to "stop picking at each other." So we poked the fire and asked every five minutes for our parents to take us home. It was always beyond nightfall when they did, leaving a few of the dads to the night shift.

Finally, I guess it was the afternoon of the fifth day, the parents all stood in a circle around the boulder and called us back from the Cup finals to their sides. We all gathered close while Jenny's dad, Mr. McMurphy, and Mr. Van Speek and another dad I didn't know screwed the ends of three long hoses to the spigots on the rec building near the sideline. While they came closer and closer, letting out green loops of hose as they went, Mom pulled me back from the boulder. Mr. Berend had his giant hand on Mom's back and Alec stood on his other side. We wouldn't look at each other, but looked instead at all the parents back their kids away. Even the fire seemed like it was waiting, you know?

We all held our breath and didn't know who would turn on the water, and then Mr. Berend ran to the spigot and turned it on high and the water rushed out the nozzle ends of the hoses. The three streams shot up over the side of the boulder and the dull gray surface turned almost brown as the water spread over the top of the stone. Steam rose into the trees and up toward the sky and the water sprayed off the edges and hit our faces and there was a loud crack that we barely heard over the hiss of the hoses. Smaller cracks began to show under the spray, and a softball-sized chunk of the boulder burst off the side closest to me. A long,

crooked split started there and shot across the boulder. From the voices getting louder around me, I could tell more and more of the boulder was coming apart.

The moms pulled us kids back even further, and it seemed like from nowhere, all the dads had sledgehammers and moved forward and heaved them high over their heads and swung them down on the gray sides. My dad, of course, wasn't one of them, even though I thought I saw him for a second behind the steam that was still rising. Instead, Mr. Berend kept smiling over at me and Mom like the Jack-o'-lantern I carved the previous Halloween when I couldn't get the teeth to look straight.

"Janie, it was what you said about your dad the other day that made us use three hoses. He was right."

Mom smiled at him, but not in her happy way, and scrunched my hand tight between her fingers. I stared at the boulder as it broke apart into a huge pile, still steaming.

The whole time the boulder was falling to pieces and the fire smoked under the broken rocks, we watched and didn't talk and Mom started crying and couldn't stop and I didn't know what to say to her. I finally asked why she was crying, and she said, "Your father would have loved to see this," and crouched down to hide her face. The van moms were watching and for the first time ever, I glared at them and hated them and their big vans that made my mom's Beetle look small. They just shook their heads, and I tried to shield Mom from all their looking. When Mr. Berend came over, his face all worry and no more Jack-o'-lantern smiles, I tried to hide her from him too, but he stepped between us with his thick legs and put his hand on her shoulder. Mom shrank away from him. "I can't," she said, "I can't." And she grabbed my hand and pulled me away and I could feel Marty Van Speek's

and Mindy McCall's and everyone else's eyes on me like the heat from the fire and I could still hear a few sledgehammers crushing the stone.

Before Her Time

Leaves and more black flies blow in over her shoulders when she enters, and they add color to her once-steely hair. Gina sits in Amber Falls' only diner at a gray paneled booth. Neighbors clink forks against knives, mash cigarettes into tray edges, swat thick hands at dodging flies, and push plates back from full bellies.

She's lived here fifteen years, knows everyone. Knows flies. She orders an omelet that she knows will come stuffed with huge square-chopped onions and green peppers, covered with two slices of partially melted cheddar, and flanked by a wall of crisp hash browns. She will salt and pepper all of it.

When Gina was a girl, only five or six before her father died, flies had spotted the ceiling tiles of her family's wind-wracked home. They came in through chinks in the walls, laid eggs, and spawned a blackness that circled noisily around their heads.

Gina knew flies were small, filthy. That they could be killed with a quick hand. She had never tried to kill them herself, slow as she was, but had always preferred to watch her father's efforts, bold with precision and strength. Lashing out at each black spot, he broke into a sheen of dripping sweat and spun on his heel flailing the air with a cracked, plastic fly-swatter. He almost always failed to hit the bug, but heaving with the strain of freeing their

home of the insects, he turned to Gina and winked as if topping off a performance. In a funny voice she loved, he told her, "That was a feisty, furry fly." She applauded his efforts, giggling from the rough wood rocking chair, and the flies more often died in buzzing tailspins around her bare ankles.

Since then, there had been years when she had not noticed flies. Years when she indulged herself in the fruits of a husband who loved her, who early in the marriage cooked her dinner in appreciation for the extra job she worked unloading boxes at the Package Depot, the only job she could find when they really just needed the money. The same husband who, in later years, made her cook and clean up after her second job because she wasn't doing enough to help pay for the tough little shack of a home they were buying.

There were years, after her husband left, when she worked a job filing library books earning near volunteer wages but feeling more contented than ever before. After each day at the library, she tried to replenish the soft oils that had seeped from her fingertips into the book bindings, leaving her hands coarse, dry, and numb.

Other years came when the flies returned full force, the ceiling's white nubs seeming to sprout overgrown shadows that zipped down, caught in Gina's hair and reappeared overhead in shadow form. During these times, Gina equated herself to the hairy insects, caught, lethargic. It was as if, like the flies, the blue sky on the other side of the glass appeared new to her every few minutes, and she was banging her head again. Only for Gina, the buzzing autumn death was spread out over a lifetime, and she still hadn't figured out yet where the opening was to get out.

Baker, the diner's cook and owner of the bait store in back, rounds her booth divider and swats the wall with blue plastic. He slaps at a far corner of the table and again at the padding of the seat across from her. His shirt slides up in back, caught on the knot of his apron string. Flies are falling.

One startled insect leaps up and lands on her cheek. Gina pictures its fine legs caught in the vice of one of her wrinkles, shoos it away. Smiling placidly at Baker's face, she thinks, no sweat. No funny voice. These flies are dying before their time. "Kill them all," she tells him.

He drops the swatter on the booth seat, mutters about customers standing with the door open. He must return to the kitchen to cook another omelet.

Gina watches him go, then stares at the downed flies. She looks out a nearby window as if seeing the bare trees for the first time, folds her hands on the chipped tabletop, and awaits breakfast.

Late Hazel

Every morning, Marie and I carpool to work. We travel through town, then down Highway 54 to 108 to the intersection at County Trunk C where we turn left to wind the last few miles to the factory. Only a quarter mile from our turn is the only stop sign on our route and every morning, Marie slows smoothly to a halt. After looking both ways, she quickly gains speed across the road. The intersection could be a town with its church and three visible farms, but it's nothing more than a corner created with another road that stretches far beyond our view in both directions.

The white church steeple stands white and tall, higher than the oaks surrounding it and shading the cemetery. At the top of the steeple (I knew from deep dusky nights when we'd been late at work) is a broad-armed neon cross that calls parishioners down from the coulees at night.

When we began carpooling together, Marie told me her family came from the nearby Bell Coulee area. We talked a lot then to fill the space of the car trip, but now we hardly need to talk. I am prone to daydreaming, so most days Marie does not speak until we come to the church and I check my watch.

"7:53," I tell her. "We're running late." She slows for the stop sign and I look at her as if for the first time. "Your grandfather is in this cemetery, isn't he?" She nods. I brace

myself for the accelerator, but we don't move forward. Marie swings the wheel left, and I bump my shoulder against the door. "Your grandfather didn't die, did he?"

She shakes her head. We gain speed along a road we've never been down together before. "Marie, you know I hate to be late."

"You won't be late," she says as smoothly as she had turned the wheel.

"So what are we doing?" I don't even hear if she answers because at that moment, we climb the hill. A couple farmhouses unfold in the flat open field below, we plunge into the lowland past their whiteboard walls and rise another hill. On the other side of that hill are more houses and another hill until we are sure that the pattern will repeat infinitely.

"Hazel," she draws my attention back into the car. "I don't exist."

I stare at her. I believe I could reach over and touch her and she is real. What is unreal is that she has called me Hazel. Despite our long history, I have wondered before if she knew my name. "Why didn't you ever tell me?" I ask her.

"I never knew." She tightens her grip on the wheel. Yet her knuckles don't white out the way they usually do, but stay so pink they seem to thicken with blood. "My mother told me the story last night, that my grandfather was taunted by a stranger the day he died, the day I was born. The stranger told my grandfather that he wasn't really there. My grandfather was proud and told the man, 'If I don't exist, neither does my brand new granddaughter.' The stranger caught his words in a box." She wrung the wheel cover. "We are close to my grandfather's house."

*****

The house reminds me of a hawk perched on a branch. It hunches its shoulders, puffs out its chest and seems to turn its head to watch us come. We will try to take shelter in it before it can swoop down and snatch us up.

Marie doesn't speak. Maybe she thinks I am daydreaming, I think, so I look at my watch. "7:53," I tell her. "We'll be late."

She doesn't answer but slips from the car and skitters across the yard of tall grass packed down by snow. Her steel-toed hikers catch along the way, but she continues on. I follow.

Inside the front door, which opens easily onto icy darkness, Marie drops to her knees. I almost don't see her and trip on her boot as I enter. She pries up rotten boards with her fingers. I have never touched her hands, and I wonder now what it is like.

I go on to explore the house by myself and find that it is hawk-like inside too. There are mice in its belly and I feel weightless. Other than the mice, every room, upstairs and down, is empty. When I return though, Marie has pulled up the floorboards and tossed them aside in piles, and the space she has cleared is not empty. All the mice living there have scattered and she holds a box up to me.

"My mother laughed when she told it. I didn't believe it, but she told me to check." Marie kneels in front of me on the few remaining floorboards. "You look for me," she says, and jabs the box in my direction.

I take it from her, and the wood is cold. The edges are rough-cut and though I don't move my fingers, it seems to force slivers into my skin. As I lift the hinged lid and stare into the box, I am so stunned by the breath of air that falls on my face that Marie fades from my sight. The golden velveteen lining crumbles in the swirl of air and whisks into the open like a

glimmer of sunlight. I run my fingers along the exposed inner slats, which are more pale than the outer surfaces of the box. One long stiff sliver rising from the corner pricks me, and dropping it, I run from the room across angled floorboards and still solid support beams.

*****

I am driving to work, down a road I've never traveled before. I'm prone to daydreaming, but when I come to the stop sign by the church, I check my watch.

"7:53," I say aloud. "I'll be late."

POETRY

Possibly Impossible

"I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." - *Lewis Carroll*

I have no doubt that while
I look through my windows,
they look through me
and last night
when they spoke,
they said, "We like what we see."

I will testify
that the creamy texture of my mashed potatoes
comes not from a box,
not from milk,
but from a deep-seated desire in potatoes
not to be chewed;
the drawers of my dresser
still belong to the tree they once were
and one day, It's spirit will call and
they'll creep back
to the forest;
that for cotton trousers, my closet is only a rest
stop, and when their energy returns,
they will unravel themselves
and walk on fibrous legs South
for the field's reunion;
and that though I have eaten all,
I believe my kitchen still feels full,
that my ingestion has severed the limbs of
bottles boxes and jars
and they still communicate with the brain
in the cupboard.

I believe that someday
my mapless, misguided feet will
scratch the road and before long
a hitchhiker
will appear and thumb me home.

Ode to Neruda's Socks

Mine
are not wool
or hand-made.
They are
only Wigwam's
white,

a little
thin in the heel
and toe.

Mine do not
gather
images of
blackbirds and
firemen.

They are only
fresh onions
plucked from
dark
shallow earth,
ripe and pungent.
They are children
shaking
the oak door,
anxious to get
out and roll in
tall grass.
They lie in wait
for an unworthy poet's
calloused feet,
dredging
dreams from
the bottoms
of cedar drawers.

They are poor socks,
worn with holes and
bare spots that
disguise warmth.
But I will darn them
with thick thread

and wear them
until rough hardwood
has snagged and gnawed
them thin
and raw.

Church and Chicken Soup

I relished the smell of your chicken soup
so salty like bouillon.

I wanted to tell you that the smell
followed you in,
and I loved it,
but I was busy reading the tread of duck boots
a woman wore two pews ahead
so I could identify them later in the snow,
and listening to a sermon that hummed
in my ears like generators haunting

winter's chill. When we prayed,
I did not need to hold your hand.
The scent that lingered on your coat swelled
in my nose, and held me.

I received your noodles, your broth
(Jesus gave it body).
I licked again and again
until all I tasted was saltless lips,
until all in my mouth was the flavor
that church gives chicken soup
and your chicken soup gave me.

Feeding

Warthogs swarm like mosquitoes
in corn fields, rooting, dissatisfied
with those cobs left after harvest.

In black night, vision adjusts to shadows
and clipped lines.
Four hired guns sit on stumps
at the fenceline and wait
for the gnash of teeth,
the shine of tusks,
the lumbrous steps.

At the smallest sound, they take careful aim
through the throat, through the shoulder,
so the hogs cannot bolt.

More than forty fall in the night. Before vultures
can swoop out of their circles,
the carcasses are loaded onto the truck bed,
so much meat for the taking.

The truck hunkers low and rumbles,
so laden it bottoms in the ruts,
down rain-gutted, dirt roads
to the poor, no,
the poorest section of town.

The two in the truck bed
balance and slip and curse
on slick, short-haired meat, swing
then heave the bodies
dripping into yards at the feet
of waiting families
who will eat well for days
and salt pack the rest.

Watermelons

Heaviness lifts from his side of the bed,
but it does not leave.

Thoughts rest thick
in the mute scooping angle of his brow,
like two rotting watermelons
tucked under arms and hefted home
to be split and salvaged
for what remains sweet
and good.

In Georgia, whole days would sometimes pass
in conversation about watermelons;
whether we ate them with salt or with sugar, cut
in slices or wedges,
cold or warm off the truck at the side of the road or
plucked fresh from Koinonian fields;
or whether we ate them at all.
When the sun swelled red against the porch swing,
debates ended
with every watermelon
just different.

Mine was cold on the bottom half, bare
sticky juices and slippery spitting seeds.
No flavor needed. Simply
cool wet juleps
after the journey of a day.

He eats his after many days' journey,
half his melon's red flesh rotten.
I wish I had sugar to share.

Shuffling Up the Rows

In my first few days in the South,
it was lonely gator moments that kept me
company. Then,
I knew when I stepped over the threshhold
and turned to lock the door,
wiggling the key a moment to make it turn,
not noticing the gator
on the porch
beneath the swing,
you would not hear my screams.

Beyond that door
of white-knuckled, red-flooded terror,
there lay another door.
Between you and that
rattled a fan and still more;
blared a radio; blared sleep;
echoed a dream and your own voice
mumbling in your head.

If an alligator ate me—
skyscraper teeth cutting
a cityscape in my belly—
you wouldn't hear my screams.

* * * * *

But time displaces gator moments.

Daily, now, we drive by rowed trees lacing a land quilt
and aligning themselves once and again
like the corn-rows and pine plantations
of my northwoods home.

I know you dream
of taking a boy to one of these,
picnicking in a pecan palace.
I see you romanced with one quick roll,
pinned beneath him,
the knots and knobs of pecan shells and pods
prod your innocent back flesh.
You hate to ruin the magic, but . . .
"Would you mind being on the bottom?"

. . . and he rolls again and walks away.

He knows what it's like to be on the bottom.

And I know what it is to be here,
among gators and pecan groves
that shuffle up their rows again when I am past.

Land of Trembling Earth

Beneath our trolling motor, gators hover on the hot,
dense still of the day. Out of reach,
they sun studded backs
blend with lily pads and undergrowth, hiss
warnings as we pass.

We dizzy ourselves among towering bald cypress,
trek inland across peat floors, pluck
water lilies from murky bottoms,
until I touch the arm next to me and another
pulls her feet back from the tannic water.

All that moves is the tail, an unseen undercurrent,
an occasional swish
that propels it forward on patrol around our motor boat.
Fangs, those sharp-zippered jaws,
dangle in gold-on-onyx reflections.
As we watch, sun yellow fades
to early evening, and this scene shapes the day

and night, when we track
their chirps with the shaky beams of flash-lights.
Suwannee's guardians, the gators send red, mirror-eyed
warnings before sinking
into swampy beds.

Returning to camp for the night, we sink as well
to anxious sleep, knowing that they hover close,
and stand swamp-toothed sentry.

Pecan Season

I. I bring three of the season's first pecans to the office,
like a child with frogs in my pocket,
and show them to the others. "Pecans,"
I tell them and roll the smooth, brown coats in the palm
of my pink-cold hand.

II. Laloma Park, like a broad green vat, holds them,
waiting to be stirred into pies, granola, cookies, and bars.
The canopy over Jubilee's screened porch draws squirrels
to its tight-packed seeds; nearer Joy Shop,
the tree moans with the weight of bullet-shaped bombs;
but the fullest, roundest nuts drop behind Nehemiah
and Mir. A few nuts remain on stubborn red clay,
chewy inside hard rinds, anticipating
translation into new trees.

III. Stuffing the ground full of pecans, exuberant squirrels
feed some unknown hunger in red clay,
then satisfy themselves, chewing the shells
until they bleed from the gums.
When I pick pecans, I leave the tough shells,
red and exposed with gnawing.
I pick only whole, sleek pods from the stubbled grass
and store them in bags
that I knot and hang from my door,
like socks filled with change, saved for a rainy day.

IV. Later, when I shell them indoors, I do it the way I've been taught,
hold one against the other in my hand,
pressing them together like gladiators in a ring,
until one gives way and releases the two perfect halves
of one wrinkled seed.
I stash the pieces in baggies, stack them
in the freezer, and wait for winter.

Resonance

for Fr. Ralph

These bells ring across roofs
like butterflies flickering over grass,
and toll the same
as Uncle's upright clock.

For months, he lingered
in the pipe smoke's sweet succulence and
the coppery well-rubbed scent of pennies
trapped in paper pods.
I can almost taste the bitter metallic orange
sipped from the Bluebird tin can's keyhole.

When we heard he died, I was with my sister
shopping for her wedding dress. She wanted
him to perform the ceremony

as I do still someday.

I will whisper my vows before this
priest uncle Father Ralph.
I promise to love and cherish;
to drink juice from miniature tin cans
like liquid daily vitamins;
to care for family in sickness and in health
until death do us part;
to relish the snuff of seductive smoke;
and always to recall the resonance of these bells.

Seeing Fireworks

1. Days after the birth of my brother Tony,
my three oldest brothers rode their bikes
on mother's orders down the street to the greenway.
They must have stopped to play in the creek
with the crayfish and the stones
shaped for damming. They must have climbed
the willow's weak limbs,
because finally, they sped home
like sirens blared before them,
Doug with the biggest willow switch
they could cut with a jackknife, Steve with the story
of a snapped branch and a long fall,
and Phil with a broken leg.

After the bone was set, the boys jammed the cutting
into the ground, christened it Tony's tree,
and watched it grow.
Like the explosive end of a lit fuse, the willow shot up—
a firework flaring up and out
and back down as if to singe our foreheads
with its sparkling tips.

2. Every year on the Fourth of July,
we kids scrambled up the ladder of bolts and 2x4s
to the shed roof.
From that height, we watched the fireworks
drape themselves over the heads
of young neighborhood trees, and dreamed
we were leaf sparks ourselves.

3. The roof is weak now with the weight
of wind and rain and giddy children, and the willow,
rising faster than the rest,
has led the frenzy of growing trees, all too tall now
for us to see the fireworks from home.

The soft maple overpowers the ancient locust, the elm
fell to disease, and the birch is only a white-brown
stump. The rest are the flailing
night-green arms and trunks of adult trees, strong,
steady, filled with rings of age.

Driving by Touch

Driving by,
I see the barren
grass-and-blacktop playground,
trimmed with pine
planted in a grade school memory
where no children play
but those I played with then.

Memory blinds me to the road
though I feel it
beneath me,
knowing that if I angle
to white line or
yellow,
I will feel it from my
bottom up—
a small grating
a rough bump to the side
a dip that drags the wheels from the groove
assigned. I recognize
danger by touch,
but children do not;

they play fire engine on jungle gyms
or make trains on the slide,
piling a totem pole of reds,
blues,
yellows.

When I played here, we planted trees
that grew where we had tamped down
earth about their roots, evergreens
that lined the edge of the playground,
building layer
upon
layer of bark,
one protecting another.

Until I felt myself drive past
their limbs
applauding over white flesh ground,
the adult
(buried to the thighs) brown trunks

almost went unseen.

Where all else has grown small,
the evergreens have grown.
They play "Red Rover"
never calling the children over
(only watching from the corner),
and they always win,
an unbreakable chain barring the road, saving
from those who drive by touch.

Hemmed In

After a year sewn in by creeping vines
and braided between mud-brown rivers,
I begin to understand cycles
of stately swamp cypress, growing
in murky stagnance, looking dead in naked,
slender glory. Now, they stretch
on tiptoe in shallow pools
and feel the dry, bevelling of their wintered
flesh. In only short months, when the rains come,
they will give up their proper stance
and their dry skirts. They will drop hemlines,
give the mud full heel,
and feel the sweaty warmth whisper
in the narrow gaps
of their thighs.

Geometry Lesson

Because he is all bulk and shapes
sprawling in celebration
of the freedom to sprawl,
and I am all angles and lines,
he underestimates my need
for space.

Why, then, would he wish to curl up with this
bony frame—as good
as warming himself on
cold water plumbing pipes—instead of soothing
himself in a bathtub
of steaming supple warmth?

Feeling empty and narrow,
I want to pull him so close
that he will blend into me and I into him
like peaches filling pie—
I forming the shell, and he
holding the definite shape of me.

The Cage Door Is Open

Sparrows come each morning
like an alarm
to twitter and play
against my air conditioning box. They greet me,
then tell me I can stop here,
but I cannot stay.

In crisp, open air, tiny claws clutch and scrape
on the outer bars of my sleeping brain,
to remind me that the cage door
is open, that I can return
to the lush land, the thick piney woods,
the canoeable North.

Free, they flutter outdoors, brush
the echo of evergreen in my mind,
and fly away.

spirit in the trees.

for Thomas

One squinting eye
wanes tired in half-lit hospital room
and turns upon me,
while words of comfort hum quilted
phrases.

His bare arm, like tree branch
stretching leaf-petal wing-tips to the other side,
touches all
but eternity.

I come with grassy caresses, but
they mean little.
Beside him, I can only follow in shadow
the way he has come alone. I

take the virus and suffer it to touch me first christen
it in blood as it becomes my holy spirit delve like a mole
inside, nudging and digging blindly I taste its texture,
rough and gentle intermittently, its appetites always in
control, seizing organs on whim distinguish its finger-
touch from all others—pounding fingers on piano-key
flesh (Music
played to the tune
of prayer,
composed of
pain, and felt . . .)

It is his blessing that he still knows pain.

I reach for tree branch limbs,
and the brown, angular arm that
hooks over—
breath on a bloated belly—
and falls, hand
into my hand.

Hyetology

1. When I heard about the flooding,
I thought of the llamas, and the guineas
that watch-dogged the neighboring farm
where Sherman fed the heifers every morning;
the mules that followed us hoping
for hand-fed nuggets;
the miniature greyhound, Marley,
walking on bony whippet stalks;
the goldfish swimming circles in the pond out back;
and the flowers Joy named for me one by one—
yucca blooming down the road,
Indian blanket and morning glory sheeting
yards and fields.

2. If the waters came,
rushing through their everything,
driving Sherman and Joy up the stairs to the loft
where I once slept,
and staining the quilt she'd stitched and hung
high from the rafters,
I hoped they would crawl to the top,
up to the roof tiles they laid, together,
over which they fell deeper
in love, later in life,
where they could repose confident,
waiting for rescue,
upon the stalwart beams
and all they'd built,
beneath them.

3. They call it the greatest flood
in five hundred years. It weathered
and carried away buildings,
automobiles, the trees and flowers,
mules and guineas and llamas.
Those who could, those like my friends
who were strong, weathered it. Those who were not,
bent, weary, under the soaking pressure.

This Side of Milladore

The swaying elm stands
in the fallow strip between two fields—
a feathered fan to the sweating earth.
My brother marked this tree,
his favorite, before he left home
for the desert.

A tree like that you have to see from all points.

So I burrow along
long slim corn rows at dusk
for a northern view of that trunk,
the bark,
its limbs.

Seeing the movement, farmer's wives will ask their men,
"Will you look at that wind?"
as if a breeze picked just that row to ripple,
and I will ask myself
why my brother made himself so like that elm,
a nighttime shadow in my mind.

Thinking of him alone in the desert,
I'll hunch on a field boulder to watch
Comanche moon
squint between miles of cloud cover
and capture the tree in a silhouette of solitude
before rolling back into the gray head
of the sky.

Laloma Morning

Once, when sunrise stole grapefruit
tinges from the sky,
I walked into Laloma morning to discover
a thousand red breasts against red clay, searching
wormless ground for their meal
and finding only mounds, plump with fireants.
They stopped here only to rest,
not halfway to their Midwest destination.

They must have recognized me from the low hills and pines
of northwood summers,
and the shallow-cut creek of the nearby greenway.
They could have called me by name,
but they parted at my feet
like a reverential crowd, side-stepping
on white-gray gravel,
and bade me, in low congregational scratches
and hums to follow their spring migration
north and home.

In the Act of Falling

After the leaves no longer link legs
to nubs of the smallest branches,
before they rest on the wood floor
to mingle with morning dew and
add the color of comfort to death,

they are falling.

Leaves spiral down, curl and crystallize
in the deepening cold of open space,
to meet lengthening shadows.
Their shapes reminisce over a greener season,
but celebrate the stiffening wrap
of their barbed arms around brazen air.

From maple heights, they freefall,
live amorous of their own beauty,
celebrate again the summer of their lives,
descend to the floor of winter,
watched by the already fallen.

Superstition

She is flickering summer
Black-eyed Susans winking eternally
from the sunken shoulder.
She peers over broadleaves, sees me and calls,
but I drive on.
I have superstitions about the unopened
buds; if I touch them,
with fingers, pant legs, lightest breath of air,
they will never open.
They'll remain tight-lipped
and silent of color,
and wither before they can ever become
the grandmother I never knew.

Tradition

1. Going through Grandma's dresser drawers, we find deep cushiony stacks of tissues she saved, squared, tucked in her cuffs. Dollar bills folded inside. Like the chocolate samplers in her cubby. Have a brandy toddy before bed—

From my own drawer, a lining
beneath socks and tights, I pull the card
she sent when I was five. The quivering
scrawl, the little girl
on the cover, the words I couldn't read,
but knew they said *I love you.* Felt
they said, *I want to know you.*

2. Before strokes and memory loss, Grandma visited. We sat in the dining room, papers spread beneath the house's hoard of plants, a tabled forest before us. We dabbed each leaf with damp-and-Pledge dust cloths until they shone crisp-green under the fluorescent light—

I will follow tradition. She would want it.
I will lay her out, cold and thin,
crumpled on the dining room table
where the splits between leaves
work their imprints into her shoulder
blades and buttocks.
I will prepare her myself,
dab every inch of her with damp-
and-rosewater, brush rouge into the dry cracks
of her cheeks—softening now and alive
in death—and stroke the side of her paralyzed face
to a smile.

3. When I was a child, we visited monthly. Mom and Dad edged the mattress like beads on her neck and talked loudly in her ear. I came between pool tournaments or television shows. *Lori?* she brightened. *How old are you now?* Dad always explained, but to me, it was still better to be my sister. When I left the room, Grandma forgot I existed—

After finally polishing the staring glass eye,
I will lift her wasted body from table
to satin lining, smooth her sharp auburn curls
against the pillow, cross the plum-pink

wrinkled hands over the Susans
on her breast, and wait.

4. "Come give your grandmother a kiss goodbye," Mom said and motioned us closer with her own hand, Grandma's youthful twin. I went, like duty. My lips touched her cheek without pucker. She pulled me in through the one good eye and her memory dragged me about. I was trapped, somewhere behind the wall of her squinting lid—

When I know she is ready, I will draw close
and, within the kiss I give her,
breathe her final scent. I will close the door
over her body and whisper
in her covered ears,
Yes, Grandma, we are close now.

Rhythms for Silence

I. The young deserve burial too.

Young and fragile, padded feet beat a pulse
over cold morning pavement, fleeing
beyond and back to brutal, toothed tires.

In that moment, I might have seen the car's full force
knock her to the still-downy side,
though youth's velvet gown veiled her lean body.

I would have shared my garden,
opened the gate and shooed her *in*;
displayed before her my buffet of safety.

I would have dug her a burrow with ungloved hands,
then presented my blackened fingernails
as proof of a new Unbattered Life;

hidden her in my lettuce patch, fed her
from an open, upturned hand leaf after lettuce leaf
with beans and peas till she was full;

all to keep her from this death.

Yet she lies in summer's hot, dry clarity,
fetal-positioned and waiting on a cement spit,
ears pricked at attention in death, like sleep.

She will know my garden; I will stop for her, cradle her
in lettuce-leaf coffin. I will dig for her as planned,
and leave her shallow to nibble a way out.

II. We wouldn't call a mother giving birth a girl.

She is a Rabbit giving birth beneath a birch.
She nuzzles the air with her nose, ears pinned,
and draws danger from grass and rain,

until she hovers on my fragrance. She inhales
my image, breathes me; hind legs tense to my scent,
warning me to stillness with peaceful, pleading eyes

though she cannot leap away if I move. On a faint breeze,
her scent sharpens in my nose like menstrual knives.
I smell her babies from five feet back—afterbirth

that she licks from the backs of five blind thumbs,
that she nibbles like the onions and radishes
in the gardens we fenced her out of.

She curls and stretches and another pink-red pod
slips to the ground.

I want to go to her, kneel in the grass, feel the damp
through my jeans, and feed her—her blood
from my hand, so she will not need to strain—

bring her babies to her mouth and turn them, her tongue
preening furless skin. I wait instead, on the sidewalk
as she breathes me in, as rain chatters

rhythms for silence.

III. She is the wise one.

She carries her age in cupped ears and wide hips.

I invite her into my garden just to watch her
nibble into the edges of lettuce leaves
the stories told from the fallen porch;

stories my grandmother learned from hers.

Nibbling lavender clover, she'll flick the burden
of peril's breath from her ears, niggle her nose,
and beat a warning across grassy lawn,

as though I'd breached rules of separation and peace.

Her flight, though, is not from me; she runs for the story
she must rescue from remote memories of rocking chairs
on creaking porches, snapping beans between practiced fingers,

cackling joy on a crackling day.

She must pluck it from the folds of a worn pocketed skirt
like the one I clung to in my youth, and when she does,
she will tell it with nibbles in lettuce

like beads in wampum, keeping a record.

Whitetail Trail

Driving through north country, south
to my apartment in Iowa, I brake hard in pre-
dawn darkness
for a buck, his antlers
a candelabra holding my headlights. My heart
a catch in my throat.
He lopes lightly across fresh blacktop
and does not look at me.
He should bound away,

but he walks slowly, with delicate steps as unfamiliar
to pavement as my tender feet would be to these miles;
he is going home where he will soothe
dizzied nerves in his patch of dry
oak-border grass at the end of his narrow trail,
each leg folding under his soft, bristled belly.

Perhaps I will have such a place someday,
where the grass remembers me
strokes my sullen back,
and waits for my shape
to shape it.

Off-Campus Heating Instructions

Light the blue pillar candle on the speaker,
the vanilla one on the CD tower, the votive
on the television top, two on the dresser
and one more, on the night table, for light.

Pajamas: socks (wool, if you have them),
pulled up your ankle as far as they reach,
long flannel pants of deep reds, worn cotton
Tee, and years-old reversible sweatshirt.

Crawl under the covers, straighten the top
sheet that twists as you sleep, the pilly blanket,
the homemade quilt, the store-bought comforter,
and two woven, Mexican imports.

Study for an hour, while the six candles and
the reading lamp raise the room temperature
one degree each (subtract one for each window),
coaxing your nose from purple to pink for sleep.

Sneak out the side of your blanket cave, blow out
the candles, and run back to bed. Burrow under
so only your forehead shows (ignore the blankets'
warmth seeping out through the thin,

thin walls). Draw the covers tight across
your neck. Hibernate in dreams of a room
with more than one blocked heater, with more
than the hissing quiet of cold.

Migration

Standing in a Georgia cemetery
among rain-marbled stones,
I could only imagine what it would be like
to live and die in the town bordered
by former presidents and old war prisons, historic
airfields and the organized hope for humanity,
and finally, never to leave those wind-worn graves.
I tipped back my head to look away,
and miles and miles of starlings
flew and
flew and
flew overhead.

This autumn, lured to another city where I will not stay,
I watch from the grassy lawn of center campus
as the starlings still fly.
High over the wide brown screen of Iowa,
they seem to demand perfection of place,
refusing flawed land,
and accepting only the broad, clean emptiness
of the wintering sky as a possible home.

Crow Scratch: a poem(s)

Even cold burrows in the black
of their breasts for warmth,
but they perch, stoic
like dark snipers in the trees.

✡

In a winter storm, even the snowflakes
reach up, cry out, and are whipped
away. The black crows fly wildly
though,
north, somewhere
past my window.

✡

An onyx length of pearls
strings itself about the throat
of the dusky sky,
in migration.

✡

If our love is black crows coming
back in February when the cold is wind-
swept and bleak, may the birds stay
for the stillness of summer.

In Early Morning Havens

I love to see them in their homes
in pre-dawn darkness
when I drive down interstate miles.

Flashing by, I think
they cannot feel more fully at home
than in the fog of groggy waking,
when they stumble
in rumpled flannel to the switch plate,
stabbing the morning awake.
The soiled patch in the carpet hides
in shadow, the tilt of the painting
straightens on an angle of light,
the coffeemaker still spits
hot black into the pot.

They stand, bleary-eyed,
in silhouette, before the window.
Their presence seems so necessary
to the scene, as if the rectangle of light I see
could not support itself
without the long stretch of knotted
shoulders, the dark tangle of tousled
hair, or the swollen clutch
of fingers through it.

For an hour already, I have sped
toward home. Instead of my own firm bed,
the lightweight blankets around me,
or the stunning light
of my own living room at dawn,
I woke in another house that,
starting cold,
has grown colder still
since the fire went out last night.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Monica Marie Kamps was born February 21, 1975 and raised in Marshfield, Wisconsin. She attended University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point where she was the Editor-in-Chief of *Barney Street* literary magazine and President of her Habitat for Humanity campus chapter. After receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1997, she moved to Americus, Georgia where she volunteered for a year with Habitat for Humanity International both as a Special Projects Coordinator for the Campus Chapters and Youth Programs (CCYP) department and as the Assistant Editor of *Frameworks*, CCYP's international quarterly newsletter. Since 1998, she has been attending Iowa State University where she has been Associate Editor of *Sketch* literary magazine and a Teaching Assistant of First-Year Composition for two years.

Her publications include:

knotgrass	Possibly Impossible Out the Back
Sophie's Wind	Geometry Lesson In the Act of Falling This Side of Milladore
Waterways	The Cage Door Is Open